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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, INL/AAE BUHLER

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: "THE SANDPIT GENERALS"

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: On the occasion of Turkmenistan's Independence Day, President Berdimuhamedov conferred the rank of the Major General (MajGen) to the Minister of Defense (MOD) and the Chief of the State Border Service (SBS). Several other military and law enforcement officers were promoted in rank and title. There are now four Turkmen major generals. Compared with former President Niyazov, President Berdimuhamedov seems more cautious in empowering military and law enforcement officials with high titles and ranks. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) On October 27, Turkmenistan's Independence Day, President Berdimuhamedov issued a decree conferring military and special titles and class ranks to military and law enforcement officials. Minister of Defense, Colonel Yaylym Berdiyev and Chief of the State Border Service (SBS) of Turkmenistan, Colonel Myrat Yslamov were conferred the rank of Major General. These promotions increased the number of the MajGens in Turkmenistan from two to four. So far, only the Minister of National Security Charymyrat Amanov and Deputy Minister of Defense, Chief of the Main Service for Civil Defense and Rescue Operations, Muhammetguly Atabayev held this rank. No current official holds the rank above MajGen, except for Berdimuhamedov himself. Former Minister of Defense Mammetgeldiyev, who was awarded by Turkmenbashy with the rank of Army General, retired early this year. Presently, in a country with an estimated 50,000-person army, only President Berdimuhamedov has the rank of Army General. Another general, Gurbanmuhammet Kasymov, former Turkmen Ambassador to China and later to Kazakhstan, resigned his position due to health reasons.

14. (SBU) Several other heads of military and law enforcement agencies were promoted. LTC Guychgeldi Hojaberdiyev, Chief of the President's Security Service and LTC Aman Garayev, Chief of the State Counter Narcotics Service of Turkmenistan, were promoted to the rank of Colonel. Minister of Internal Affairs, LTC of Police Isgender Mulikov, was promoted to the rank of Colonel of Police. Majors Orazgeldi Esenov, Chairman of the Customs Service, and Seyitniyaz Ballyev, Chairman of the Migration Service were promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Senior Counsellor of Justice, Prosecutor General of Turkmenistan Chary Hojamyradov was promoted to the Third Level State Counsellor of Justice. Head of the Supreme Court, Yaranmyrat Yazmyradov was moved from the Third to the Second Qualification Level. Finally, Minister of Justice Myrat Garryev was awarded with the title of State Counsellor of Adalat (Justice).

15. (SBU) The ranks above major are only conferred by the Turkmen president, which usually causes a delay for career military and law enforcement officials in getting their promotions for length of service. A Senior Lieutenant (SLT), a friend of the an Embassy local staff member, said that "a lot of military officers wait for years until the president finally signs their promotion decrees." The rank of MajGen has traditionally been the rank for a Deputy Minister-level official, while the head of an agency normally held the rank of a Lieutenant General (Lt.Gen) or a Colonel General (ColGen). During the Niyazov period, an appointee to the Deputy Minister or Minister-level

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position would automatically receive a title of General." For instance, former SBS Chief Alovov, when appointed to the position, was conferred the rank of MajGen immediately from the rank of Major. "Berdimuhammedov doesn't do so," SLT said. "Many military officers hold positions above their ranks. Commanders of a military unit, which is normally a Colonel level position, are often a Major or even a Captain. Majors led the ministries."

16. (SBU) There were many generals in Turkmenistan in the early 1990s, but only two were ethnic Turkmen, General Kopekov, later Minister of Defense of Turkmenistan and Lt. Gen Ilya Veljanov later Turkmen Ambassador to Belarus. Non-Turkmen generals moved to the countries of their ethnicities after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Niyazov was generous with awarding titles not only to himself, but also to others. He increased the number of Turkmen generals during his presidency, but at the same time sent most of them to long term imprisonment before his death. Among those who survived Niyazov were Army General Mammetgeldiyev (MOD); ColGen Akmyrat Rejepov, Head of Presidential Security; MajGen Alovov, Chief of SBS; and MajGen Ashyrmuhammedov, Minister of National Security. Berdimuhamedov got rid of all of them: Mammetgeldiyev retired, Rejepov was imprisoned, Alovov and Ashyrmuhammedov were dismissed.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: The Sandpit Generals was a 1971 Soviet film featuring a street gang of poor homeless youth struggling for existence in Brazil, but captured by police and sent to prison. In the past, Turkmen generals have often shared a similar fate, winding up in prison. A retired Colonel, former Head of Ahal Province Military Commission, said that when he was called in by his good friend, Minister of Defense Mammetgeldiyev, and offered a position within the Ministry and a rank of MajGen during Niyazov's regime, he declined. "I would better stay free as a Colonel than in prison as a General" he said in his

confession to a civilian friend. It remains to be seen whether fate is kinder to this latest class of Turkmen generals. END COMMENT.

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